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Great PowerRestorationists makegains in the RussianDuma

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Conclusions

- Politicians advocating restoration of Russia as a great power strengthened their position in theDecember 1995 Duma elections. Although communist and nationalist gains fell short of the two-third majority needed to override a presidential veto, these groups (who are united in theirsuspicion of Western intentions) now enjoy a solid majority in the new lower house.

- By contrast, parties advocating integration with Western security systems suffered significantlosses, even though they had muted the pro-Western components of their programs.

- The dominant role of great power restorationists in the new Duma will increase pressure on theYeltsin regime to assume a more assertive stance vis-a-vis the West.

- The most important consequence of the parliamentary election is its impact on the election thatreally counts: the presidential race. The main beneficiary of the strong conservative showing isCommunist Party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov, who emerged as the strongest challenger to bothPresident Boris Yeltsin and the still-disunited reformists.

Great Power Restorationist Victory at the Polls

The new Duma which began its session on January 16th is considerably more nationalist in itsorientation than the one it replaced. Communist and nationalist parties--deeply divided on somedomestic issues but united in the idea that Russia must be restored as a great internationalpower--significantly strengthened their position, from 39% in the old Duma to 62% in the new one.These great power restorationist deputies share many common national security goals, such asreintegration of some of the other Soviet successor states and strengthening the armed forces. Theyalso share a strong suspicion of Western, particularly U.S., intentions toward Russia. The strongshowing of the mainstream Communist Party (which advocates restoration of the USSR and won 157of the 450 Duma seats) is symptomatic of the shift in political alignments in the new Duma.

At the same time, parties advocating Russia's integration with Western security systems weresoundly defeated. Such groups controlled a quarter of the seats in the old Duma; in the new one, theyrepresent only 15%. For instance, in 1993, the pro-Western Russia's Choice party came in second inthe party list

race and did well in the single seat races, winning 76 seats in all. In the most recentelection, Choice won less than 4% on the party list vote (failing to break the 5% barrier), garneringonly nine seats in the new Duma--not enough to form their own faction.

Centrist parties also fared poorly, mirroring their modest results in the 1993 election. Mostsignificantly, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's "Russia is Our Home" party received only 10%of the vote, despite its advantages as the incumbent party in control of major electronic media andpatronage and at least some tinkering with voting results (i.e., in Chechnya).

Yeltsin staffers and party spokesmen tried to buffer the negative public relations consequences

of the vote by pre-election statements stressing their modest expectations. Nevertheless, 90% of theelectorate voted for groups running in explicit opposition to the Government's policies--anundeniable rejection of the President's and Prime Minister's policies.

Reform-minded commentators and officials have also tried to portray the election not as a victoryfor conservative forces, but a defeat for "democrats," who bungled their chances of victory byrefusing to unite. Nine percent of the party list vote went to parties that support integration withWestern security systems but failed to gain the 5% minimum needed to acquire a share of the partylist seats. In fact, however, candidates on the opposite end of the foreign policy spectrum--greatpower restorationists--suffered even more from the failure of conservative forces to unite: 21% ofthe party list vote went to communist or nationalist parties that failed to make the 5% cutoff.

Distribution of Seats in the Duma

Party	Party List Vote*	Party List Seats	Single Seat Winners	Total Seats
Great Power Restorationists**				
Communist Party	22.3	99	57	156
LDPR (Zhirinovskiy)	11.2	50	1	51
Agrarian Party	3.8	------	20	20
Communist/Working Russia	4.5	------	1'	1
KRO (Lebed)	4.3	------	5	5
Derzhava	2.6	------	------	------
Others	5.8	------	45	45
Subtotal:	54.4%	149	129	278 51.8%
Centrists***				
Russia is our Home	10.1	45	10	55
Other Centrists	15.1	------	28	28
Subtotal:	25.2	45	38	83 18.4%
Parties Advocating Integration With Western Security System@				
Yabloko	6.9	31	14	45
Others	8.8	------	24	24
Subtotal:	15.7%	31	38	69 15.3%
Political Affiliation Unknown	------	------	20	20 4.4%

* An additional 4-5 percent is comprised of votes against all parties and spoiled ballots.

** All but a handful of great power restorationists joined one of four hardline Duma factions: Communists (149 members); Agrarian (35 members); LDPR (51 members); People's Power

(38 members). One joined Russia's Regions, which represents politicians from across the political spectrum. Several are unaffiliated.

*** Ten additional single seat winners joined the Chernomyrdin faction, with a total of 65 members. An additional 13 Centrist deputies joined Russia's Regions. Five are unaffiliated.

@ One additional single seat winner joined the Yavloko faction, which currently has 46 members. Nine reformist deputies joined Russia's Regions. Fourteen remain without factional affiliation.

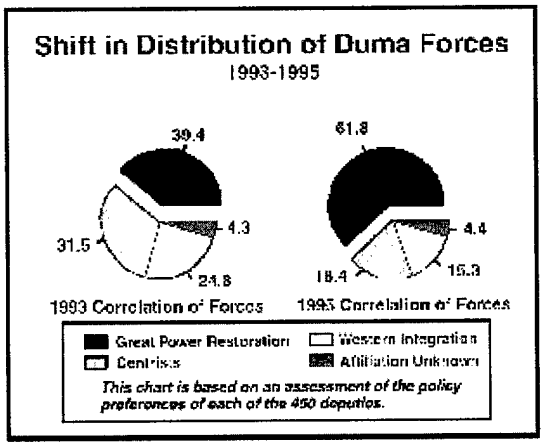
This chart is based on an assessment of the policy preferences of each of the 450 deputies.

Limits on the Duma's Role

The implications of the great power restorationist victory in the Duma are more limited thanwould be the case in a political system with a strong legislature. Most constitutional authority inRussia is concentrated in the executive branch. For instance, Yeltsin is not constitutionally obligedto change anyone in the Cabinet, including the Prime Minister, as a result of his opponents' victory.

Nor can the Duma move forward with its own legislation without Yeltsin's assent. Conservativeforces would need a reliable two-thirds majority to override a presidential veto. Even then, theywould need support from the upper house (Federation Council), which must also muster a two-thirds vote--a development made unlikely by the fact that this body is no longer directly elected butinstead consists of the top executive and legislative leader of each province. Because the majorityof provincial administrators are Yeltsin appointees, Yeltsin currently controls around a third of theupper house membership, casting considerable doubt on the Federation Council's ability to overridea presidential veto.

This near-monopoly of power by the President means that great power restorationists, eventhough they enjoy a solid majority in the new lower house, have only limited ability to translate theirpolicy preferences into action.



The Election's Real Impact

Still, the Duma will surely become a center of public pressure on the Yeltsin regime to decreasecooperation with the West. The already-strong Russian consensus against NATO expansionprobably will harden. The prospects for START II (at least in its current form) ratification are

evenbleaker, particularly in light of the upcoming presidential elections (now scheduled for June 16th). In addition, the new Duma likely will be somewhat more receptive to larger defense budgets andto measures to expand military conscription.

Moreover, great power restorationist forces likely will try to exploit what they will surely depictas a popular mandate to push for reintegration of some of the other Soviet successor states. Communist leaders, who campaigned on the promise to denounce the Belovezh Forest agreementdissolving the old Soviet Union, likely will renew their effort to have Russia officially renounce thisagreement. Although this move has no legal force, it will be seen in Russia as a direct slap atYeltsin--the only signatory to the Belovezh agreement still in office.

The President, who is determined to hang onto power, has seen the handwriting on the wall andis now trying to steal the thunder of the great power restorationists by adopting some elements oftheir approach to national security. Yeltsin has already shifted further to the conservative end of thepolitical spectrum, in a desperate effort to coopt the populist issues that catapulted his hardlineopposition to victory in the legislative elections.

The most obvious example of Yeltsin's attempt to burnish his patriotic credentials is thereplacement of Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev--architect of the now-discredited pro-Westernforeign policy--with Yevgenniy Primakov, who occupies the moderate end of the great powerrestorationist spectrum. Primakov has already embarked on a series of visits to the other formerSoviet republics, to underline Moscow's new stress on ties with these states.

The Primakov appointment has been accompanied by a number of anti-reform changes ondomestic issues--such as the removal of economic reformer Anatoliy Chubais and the installationof hardliner Nikolai Yegorov to head the presidential staff--and a string of populist promises to payback wages to workers.

Implications for the Presidential Elections

The most important consequence of the parliamentary election is its impact on the election thatreally counts: the presidential race. In effect, the Duma election was a surrogate presidentialprimary. The election made clear that no candidate openly espousing reformist views, such asintegration with Western security systems, has much hope of winning in the presidential elections. The election also demonstrated the depth of nationalist and communist sentiment in the country,providing momentum for the parties on that end of the political spectrum.

The main beneficiary of the strong conservative showing in the Duma elections is CommunistParty leader Gennadiy Zyuganov. Zyuganov's constituency is fragmented among those espousinga return to Soviet-style socialism and more moderate forces. Moreover, Zyuganov's claim to theCommunist banner is not uncontested; several other Communist politicians (both within Zyuganov'sown party and from more extremist communist groups) have indicated an interest in competing inthe presidential race.

Nonetheless, the Communist Party's undeniably strong showing at the polls in December haveenabled Zyuganov to take major steps toward consolidating his position as the communist standard-bearer. On February 15th, the Communist Party Congress unanimously endorsed his candidacy forthe presidency. In addition, several other leftist groups, including Viktor Anpilov's unreconstructedcommunists, have endorsed Zyuganov.

Similarly, the respectable showing of the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) haskept alive the presidential hopes of its colorful leader--Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Zhirinovskiy's partyhad slipped badly in the polls since the December 1993 elections, when the party had garnered 23%of the party list vote. Many Moscow political pundits were predicting a dismal LDPR showing in1995, perhaps even a failure to break the 5% cutoff in the party list race. In fact, however,Zhirinovskiy's party came in second in the party list vote, capturing 11% of the vote--a clear lossfrom 1993, but not a rout. The LDPR's electoral success, however modest, has bolsteredZhirinovskiy's presidential pretensions.

Retired General Aleksandr Lebed, by contrast, received a partial setback to his presidentialaspirations. Lebed, a charismatic figure who catapulted himself to national prominence in 1994 witha highly publicized attack on Yeltsin and Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, handily won his singleseat race in Tula. However, his party--the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO)--made adisappointing showing, winning only 4.3% of the party list vote. Although Lebed remains one of thetop four or five contenders in terms of popularity and voter trust, KRO's discouraging performancewas a major blow to his hopes to use the group to provide the grass-roots organization and financialresources his bid for the presidency will need.

Similarly, the lackluster performance of moderate reformer Grigorii Yavlinskiy's party was ablow to the latter's presidential ambitions. Yabloko was able to muster only 7% of the party list vote(down from 8% in 1993). Although Yavlinskiy remains among the top presidential contenders inpublic opinion surveys, his party's modest showing in the Duma election have deprived him of themomentum he needs to unite reformist political forces behind his candidacy.

The parliamentary elections also provided a deathblow to the presidential aspirations of severalother would-be contenders, whose parties fared badly in the polls. One notable example is formerVice President and ex-general Alexander Rutskoy, who failed to win a Duma seat. His Derzhavaparty, which had hoped to capture up to 10 or 15% of the Duma vote, won only 2.6% of the party listvote, finishing 11th in a field of 43.

Finally, the modest performance by Cherno-myrdin's party was a setback for those politicalinsiders who see the prime minister (not Yeltsin) as the "party of power's" most viable presidentialnominee. This surely was a major factor shaping Yeltsin's decision--announced on February15th--to seek re-election, and Chernomyrdin's decision to support Yeltsin.

The bottom line is that all presidential hopefuls will have to either adjust their message toembrace the conservative themes that dominated the parliamentary elections or unite with otherpolitical parties in order to attract additional voters. Yeltsin's main campaign strategy seems to bethat of recreating himself as a populist and patriot, but it remains to be seen whether voters will buythe new image. The Communists already have a conservative message which will play well withmany voters in June, but they have little hope of capturing the presidency unless they can convinceother leftist and nationalist candidates to withdraw their candidacies in favor of a single communist-patriotic figure, like Zyuganov. Meanwhile, on the other end of the political spectrum, Russia'sstruggling reformers--hampered by an increasingly discredited message--remain as divided asbefore.

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|Return to NDU Homepage|Return to NDU Homepage|What's New|

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